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ABSTRACT

This report presents the impressions of three British further education specialists about American community colleges, articles by two American educators, and insights on the applicability of features of U.S. community colleges to Great Britain. First, "Community Colleges and Post-Secondary Education in the U.S.A.," by Geoffrey Melling, provides an overview of American higher education, discussing features distinguishing American and British higher education; the comprehensive community college mission; management, planning, and finance; and Miami-Dade Community College. Next, "Cash + Change = Survival + Success," by Leslie Koltai, discusses the effects of quality control, cultural diversity, institutional flexibility, financial control, demographic shifts, technological change, and changing life styles. "Success under Duress--The College and the Community," by Brunetta Reid Wolfman, describes Roxbury Community College in terms of historical background, staff development approaches, the impact of Boston's racial/cultural diversity and high unemployment rates, and problems related to racism, administration, and community relations. "Preparing for Change: Access and Progression," by Frank Griffiths, highlights the major structural changes about to be imposed on the British educational system and offers recommendations on mission, educational access, comprehensiveness and universality, and validation and accreditation. "Student Services in the USA," by Geoffrey Melling, focuses on remedial education in American community colleges. "Colleges and Employers," by Ernest Theodossin, examines the relationship between and expectations of British colleges and employers. Finally, "The American Experience and the United Kingdom," by Geoffrey Melling draws conclusions about community colleges and the future of higher education in Great Britain. (AC)

Opportunity With Excellence:
The American Community College

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Volume 20 Number 8

OPPORTUNITY WITH EXCELLENCE: THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By Geoffrey Melling, Leslie Koltai,
Brunetta Reid Wolfman, Frank Griffiths
and Ernest Theodossin

Coombe Lodge Reports

Publications Editor: Jean Finlayson

Secretary: Molly Higgs

Clerical Assistant: Sarah Tanner

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OPPORTUNITY WITH EXCELLENCE: THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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FOREWORD

In 1986 four FE specialists visited the United States to see if there was anything that British further education might learn from the American community college system. We took with us concerns which arose from our experience in Britain, for we had all seen the writing on the wall about the changes which were to come and which have since been codified in **Managing colleges efficiently** and the Education Reform Bill. We went to the US in the belief that the post-secondary education system in a successful Western economy would have features worth considering, adapting or even emulating.

David Eade, then acting FE officer for Leeds, was concerned about access and equity in post-secondary education. Geographically Leeds is our biggest metropolitan area, with a population of 750,000, where monotechnic colleges work alongside school sixth-forms and a separate community education service deals with adults. At a time when falling rolls required a reconstruction of the service, he had seen the chance to offer more opportunities both to young people and adults through a single college structure for all post-16s not in higher education in Leeds Polytechnic or Leeds University. There were clear parallels with the district systems in some American cities, hence our visit to Los Angeles. David has now returned to his post as principal of Park Lane College, Leeds.

As deputy director of FHE in Birmingham, where additional funding for further education is being attracted from sources as diverse as the Manpower Services Commission and the European Social Fund, Geoff Hall was concerned with funding and control. He was anxious that the aims and objectives of Birmingham colleges should not be distorted by short-term funding and that they should continue to offer a comprehensive service tied closely to the city's and region's economic development. He was also keen to see how American state and college governors used their powers to finance and direct post-secondary education. Since he favours a partnership between college principals and education officers and between education and training, we looked for an area where colleges operated independently,

and chose Boston and Fall River, Massachusetts. Geoff, of course, is now Director of Education for the London Borough of Bexley.

Frank Griffiths, NATFHE's Education Secretary, was contemplating the prospect of union membership falling in line with the decline in student numbers as the figure for school leavers fell to its lowest point in 1993/94. As a member of the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education, he was also concerned with enhanced access to HE, and wanted to reacquaint himself with a country which has mass provision at the higher education level.

My own concern was with training managers at the Further Education Staff College. I wanted to see how American colleges used their departments of institutional research, which provide information of all kinds to administrators, to manage for success. FESC was already involved with central and local government in finding indicators of college efficiency and we were anxious to attach these to criteria of effectiveness.

At the end of our fortnight's visit we were convinced that what we had learned should be presented to a wider audience in the UK, through both a conference and a publication. As it would be clearly nonsensical for a team of Britons to set the context of US colleges (though we had returned with dozens of 35mm slides and lots of college publicity material) we invited four Americans to join us at the conference. These were Professor Craig Johnson from Florida State University, who was already present at FESC as a Visiting Fellow; Bill Law, Vice President of St Petersburg Junior College, Florida; Brunetta Wolfman, President of Roxbury Community College, Boston; and Leslie Koltai, who at that time was Chancellor of the Los Angeles Community College District. Craig and Bill had worked together on methods of institutional research in community colleges; Brunetta was the head of a new, fast-growing and vibrant college on the Eastern seaboard; and Leslie was in charge of a number of colleges in the megalopolis on the Western coast. We are extremely grateful to all four for giving not only their time but also the benefit of their experience to an eager audience which met at FESC's Mendip Centre in October 1987.

This report gives readers an impression of colleges in America and offers some insights into what we might learn from the community college movement. It should make fascinating reading as colleges in Britain look towards their new strategic plans.

Geoffrey Melling
Director, Further Education Staff College

COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE USA

Geoffrey Melling
Director, Further Education Staff College

'The most striking recent structural development in higher education has been the phenomenal growth of the community college.' Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1970

This assessment was made at the time when community colleges were mushrooming all over America and their total enrolment had reached the two million mark. During the previous 20 years two-year colleges had expanded their enrolment from half a million and established themselves as a major tier of post-secondary education in the United States, primarily through their policy of open access for non-traditional students. By 1970 both school leavers and adults were using these institutions to begin their undergraduate careers before transferring to four-year colleges or universities. Fifteen years after the Carnegie Commission's report, in 1985, 1,300 community, technical and junior colleges enrolled about five million students, including half of all those who were entering higher education for the first time. Many students were following vocational or career courses, and some were enrolled on developmental programmes which helped them remedy deficiencies in their earlier education.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE USA

The American system of post-secondary education is large and diverse. It contains 3,300 universities and colleges of which fewer than half are in the

public sector. However, most students in the United States attend a public institution, which is responsible to its state — not to the federal government. A university will contain a four-year undergraduate college as well as several professional or graduate 'schools' for law, business, medicine, education etc. Universities offer masters', and often doctoral, degrees, but there are smaller stand-alone four-year colleges which concentrate on undergraduate work.

Community colleges are part of the public system of post-compulsory education. The very term 'community' indicates that the institution is supported from public funds, either by the state or by the town in which it is situated. Such colleges provide two-year programmes which correspond to the first two years of a bachelor's degree and lead to either an Associate of Arts (AA) or an Associate of Science (AS). Students can then transfer into the third year of a four-year college or university to complete the bachelor's degree. There are also private two-year colleges, many of which are residential. Community colleges sometimes have living accommodation but on the whole their students attend on a daily basis. Florida, for instance, established its community colleges on the principle that students should have no more than half an hour's travel to an institution: they were intended to bridge the gaps between the locations of universities. There are, however, some community colleges which serve vast and thinly populated areas. They may have both residential and distance learning facilities.

Enrolments are concentrated in relatively few institutions: 102 institutions each enrol more than 20,000 students and capture 2.8 million enrolments in total. A further 345 institutions each enrol between 10,000 and 20,000, and take six million in total. So 14 per cent of post-secondary institutions enrol 73 per cent of students at all levels -- leaving 2,850 establishments with a 27 per cent market share (3.3 million students). Many of these small institutions are private religious foundations.

THE PATTERN OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE US

The emphasis in an American bachelor's degree is on breadth and flexibility. Students working for the same qualification at the same university will not necessarily follow the same programme. This is because a degree programme is composed of a number of discrete units or 'courses' which are designed to be completed in a term — and there are many more

courses on offer than can be taken. Courses are assessed en route throughout a degree programme. The first year is called 'freshman', the second 'sophomore', the third 'junior' and the fourth 'senior'. Courses taken in the freshman and sophomore years are referred to as 'lower division courses' — and their equivalent can be followed in community colleges. Those taken in the junior and senior years are known as 'upper division courses'.

Courses making up a degree divide into three kinds:

1 **Core** courses which provide a broad base almost always include two or three courses in communication skills and others which are spread evenly between humanities, science and mathematics, and social sciences. They are taken during the lower division years and comprise about a third of the degree study.

2 **Major** requirements represent specialised study in the field in which the student is taking the degree. Some of these courses can be delivered through seminars rather than lectures. Usually the major will make up a third of the entire degree, though the present trend is towards a higher proportion (under pressure from specialists in the professional areas).

3 **Elective** courses are those which a student chooses for him/herself, though there may be constraints on the choice. (For instance, it may not be possible to take an upper division course in economics without first having taken a lower division course in economic principles.) Most universities specify that students must take a number of electives outside their major field, which allows them to explore subjects for personal interest or acquire useful skills.

Universities and colleges state their degree requirements in numbers of credits to be taken. Each course earns a specific number of credit hours depending on the amount of work involved. Typically, a course earning three semester hours would meet three hours a week per semester (half year) although a laboratory course meeting more often might earn fewer credit hours because the work involves less out-of-class preparation. The total number of credits required for a degree is 120 for a university on a semester calendar, and around 180 credits for a university on a quarterly

calendar (in which the student attends for three quarters). In each case the student completes about 15 credits per term. Because a degree is divided into units and is structured flexibly, it is possible for students who have done degree-level work at other institutions to obtain exemptions. This is called 'earning credit'. Each university can make its own decisions about allowing credit (which will depend on what it knows about the standard of work the student has undertaken previously) but there are arrangements within a state system for students to transfer and progress between institutions. The transfer is monitored by regional associations which validate courses, degrees and institutions. These are known as 'accrediting associations'.

The features which distinguish American higher education from its British counterpart are therefore:

1 the great variety of institutions, with differing academic standards;

2 open access to many establishments, especially community colleges;

3 the unit structure of degree programmes;

4 continuous assessment of units rather than terminal examinations;

5 the accreditation system which facilitates mobility between, and progression through, institutions.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES: THE BROADER MISSION

It should not be assumed from the above paragraphs that community colleges focus solely on the 'transfer' function and offer only two-year associate degrees which allow students to move on to four-year programmes. Although over a third of all post-secondary students taking courses for college credit, and over half of all freshmen taking college credit courses for the first time, are enrolled in community colleges, these institutions have a much broader role in society. Many of them emphasise a 'comprehensive mission' and 'open door' policies which reflect their roots in the campaigns for equal access to educational opportunity which

were prevalent in the years after the Second World War. This was a period during which the United States sought to satisfy the demands for education from thousands of returning veterans; and the community colleges — often called 'junior colleges' in those days to signify their intermediate status between school and the upper division — widened their goals and objectives to meet the demand. General education took on a new importance, as did student services and guidance. The colleges began to compete with high schools and started to take over much of vocational education. Remedial and developmental programmes were started to help those who needed special assistance.

Today a community college is rarely a re-flagged junior college. It will offer courses leading to transfer but will also provide 'terminal' or career programmes of vocational education and training in areas similar to those covered by British further education colleges. Some of these will lead to an associate degree (usually the Associate of Science) but others will be shorter programmes leading to a certificate. It is often possible to transfer the courses from certificate programmes into two or four-year degrees. A community college will usually emphasise its counselling and advice services for potential and enrolled students; the variety of educational methods it uses to meet the needs of students with diverse educational backgrounds and career expectations; the community service it undertakes as a contribution to social development, its opportunities for people with special needs; and the number of centres and companies it has established to work with business and industry. It will usually have far more data to present on its services and students than a British college — on the proportion of the local population taking courses; their ages, sex and socio-economic status; the proportion of local minorities served by the college; the percentage of handicapped who are enrolled; the number of workers and firms who benefit from college programmes and services; and the satisfaction or dissatisfaction expressed by clients. Colleges often have a planning unit or 'office of institutional research' to collect, analyse and present such data.

GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT, PLANNING AND FINANCE

American institutions of post-secondary education are legally independent public corporations. Each community college has a board of trustees whose autonomy to oversee the operations and management of the institution derives from a charter issued by the state in which the college is

incorporated. The powers of trustees vary from institution to institution, but trusteeship is always taken seriously. In some states the trustees will have oversight of 'districts' which contain more than one college. There can also be a board of regents in a state which is superior to the various boards of trustees. In a few instances community colleges have been established as a tier of the state university, but even where that is not the case they are an essential part of a state's system of post-secondary education.

Trustees, administrators (i.e. college managers) and faculty (i.e. teaching staff) all try to influence the regents and state legislatures, especially in periods of financial stringency when control over pay scales, course offerings, and guidelines on who or who not to enrol moves ever nearer the state centre. Many colleges have recently suffered enrolment losses or have reached a plateau in their growth owing to reductions in both local and federal support. Cuts, changing demography and competition from other suppliers of education are stimulating new approaches to planning by many community colleges — as they are with CFEs in the UK.

The board of trustees, elected locally, establishes the educational policy for a community college and employs a chief executive officer or president (principal). Vice presidents or deans manage the major areas of a college's activities such as business affairs (resources), personnel, academic instruction (transfer education) and technical instruction (vocational education). In most colleges, department chairpersons (heads of department) will report to the deans of instruction but in larger institutions there could be assistant vice presidents or associate deans to help with the main functions. Many presidents are on short-term contracts, but as the average presidential tenure during the 1970s was eight or nine years it was obviously not too precarious.

Community colleges are now dependent on state funds. In the early days when junior colleges were extensions of high schools they were supported by local taxes and student fees — and, since the fees were low, local property taxes were the major source of finance. As programmes increased in number and diversity, and enrolments included more part time and non-traditional students, community college funding shifted to state support. In the 1960s, some states (e.g. Virginia, Tennessee and Alabama) established community colleges with the state as the sole public source of funding. Now community colleges, state colleges and universities, and the public (as opposed to private) school systems are all competing for state tax dollars.

One of the results of expansion, in numbers of colleges and students, has been an increased emphasis on the planning and systematic development of community college systems at state level. It is not easy to make generalisations about such systems as each of the 50 states is different owing to its history of development in higher education, its demography (whether it is primarily urban or primarily rural) and its socio-economic characteristics.

There is a basic commitment in community colleges to no or low tuition fees (on behalf of non-traditional and disadvantaged students) but that position is under increasing threat as states and colleges try to maintain the level of their services in a period of rising costs. There is an added problem for colleges in states which use a formula for allocation of funds which is based on full time equivalent (FTE) students, if those colleges offer expensive occupational programmes. In such states colleges which have a majority of students in low-cost courses are at an advantage. Institutions now court federal funds (which aid particular categories of programme, usually vocational), grants from charitable foundations and partnerships with industry to supplement their income from the states — but the responsibility for provision remains with the state.

THE COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A community college will usually be an open access institution with lower tuition fees than a university's. It will emphasise its appeal to non-traditional entrants and will be able to prove by its enrolment that it is more attractive to them than any other type of college. It will have more ethnic minority and part time students than universities and the socio-economic level and previous academic performance of its entrants will be below the average of students in four-year colleges and universities.

The largest community college in the US is Miami-Dade CC in Florida. It enrolled 125,000 students in 1985-86 — 50 per cent Hispanic and 17 per cent black. Forty five per cent of the college's students reported that their native language was other than English; 59 per cent enrolled on a part time basis; and all students attended on a daily basis, so none were in residence. Nearly a third of Miami-Dade's students qualified for grants for disadvantaged students. These factors have obvious consequences for the provision of remedial instruction under whatever name that is offered.

In the last 10 years Miami-Dade has made 'access with quality' its slogan and has turned its back on the version of open access which gives students a 'right to fail'. The college now emphasises academic skills, standards of attainment, structured programmes and direction by staff. These reforms have been accompanied by the collection of more data on students and by strict monitoring of student performance and progress. But they have also involved regular feedback and advice to students, often based on computerised records of performance which are compiled by the teaching staff. Warnings about poor progress towards targets are accompanied by advice on how to improve and suggestions about study skills, academic counselling and learning resources. With a raft of support services available to students, the college is not afraid to suspend those who do not achieve their targets after it has made a full effort on their behalf. This has not proved harmful to the retention of minority students whose test scores have improved over the years.

ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

With the general decline in student numbers and attempts by schools to increase their involvement in vocational education and by universities to recruit into their lower divisions, colleges are having to reassess their roles. Most will be unwilling to renege on the comprehensive mission, but with retrenchment some priorities will have to be set. Recent surveys have shown that there is a poor transfer rate from community colleges to the upper divisions of universities, and there is some criticism of the colleges for lack of quality in this area. However, the right to transfer is an important part of American life — and many adults cash the credit earned in community college after a period away from education. Vocational and community education offer the advantage of serving the most rapidly growing population of learners — part time adult students. That population will continue to expand not only in numbers but probably in demand for education services. To reinforce relationships in the community would seem to be a profitable focus for community colleges between now and the turn of the century. Almost certainly remedial and developmental programmes will continue to be a part of every college's programme, but they are never likely to be the major focus. Finally, community colleges must address the issue of whether they wish to offer a distinctly 'college experience' or whether they will be satisfied with giving any client what he/she wants without reference to any over-arching concept of education which comprehends their entire offerings.

CASH + CHANGE = SURVIVAL + SUCCESS

Dr Leslie Koltai
President of the US National Centre for the Development of Education, and Chancellor Emeritus, Los Angeles Community College District

I regard the American two-year community college (CC) system as possibly the best educational invention of the 20th century. Our community colleges have excited interest from many countries because:

1 they are low cost;
2 they are first and foremost teaching institutions;
3 they provide a second opportunity for late decision makers through a comprehensive curriculum.

The origins of the American community college system can be traced back to the start of the century when too many potential students were chasing too few university places. Public schools developed an additional two-year layer (13th & 14th grades) of vocational and academic training, taking educational provision through from kindergarten to the age of 18. Then in 1946 the Truman Commission on Education for GIs gave rise to the People's College — forerunner of the community college.

The late 1950s and early '60s saw the development of comprehensive community colleges providing vocational and 'casual' (adult) education in locally funded institutions serving the population within a ten-mile radius. However, since education in general seems to pass through 40-year cycles, we are now at a cross-roads.

There are many changes in leadership, for example, one third of community college chief executive positions are open each year. The majority of community college staff were hired in the '50s and are now

reaching retirement age. We are faced with the dilemma of which generation to replace them from. And there is the vexed question of developing new curricula to meet changing circumstances.

California community colleges have a total enrolment of 1.2 million students, 42,000 staff and an annual budget of $1.4 billion. There are 106 community colleges spread over 70 CC districts. The LA Community College District is the largest in the USA. It has 6-10,000 staff serving about 150,000 students in campuses located in specific neighbourhoods. At the other extreme, one college set in the middle of the desert has a total enrolment of 350 students.

After LA the largest multi-college districts are in Chicago (80,000 students) and Phoenix, Arizona (60,000 students). Other states operate a different system, with single colleges operating from several campuses, the largest being Miami Dade with 37,000 students, Oregon with 32,000 students, and St Louis with 32,000.

The success of a country's further education system can be judged by the percentage of the college age population which is in college. The United States now has 57 per cent of its college age population in college, which means that in terms of gross national product we are at the end of the line.

If we are talking about a major increase in college age population then we have to redirect resources to education. The issue is financial. Everything else is secondary. If you have the money to fund educational objectives then you can carry out your educational responsibilities.

The key to the success of the community colleges lies in their accessibility and their ability to offer students transferable credits which can contribute towards qualifications in higher education. Open access to higher education through CCs means that anyone with a high school diploma presenting themselves at the gates is welcomed and accepted as a student. Nowadays it is increasingly the practice of CCs not to wait for students to arrive, but to reach out for them — because only through recruitment can we get students, ergo more money.

It is said that CCs will survive providing they cater for part time students, and employ part time teachers. This is the numbers game. More students mean more income, more income means an increase in cost effectiveness through larger classes, which in turn means time for applied research to

develop the curriculum, and more cash to accommodate the faculty and provide additional services. A drop in students/funding puts the process into reverse.

QUALITY CONTROL

It is not enough simply to get people into the institution. Open access gives rise to a question that many people have tended to ignore — how do we guarantee the quality of students enrolling?

Leading educationalists are now beginning to address this issue of evaluation — how to measure success in a two-year college, from the institutional and student point of view. Do you measure it by the number of students who receive education; how many transfer to higher education, or graduate with an AA degree; or by how many get jobs, or get jobs and transfer to higher education later?

In the 1950s we prided ourselves on screening out those students who were not up to their studies. Now the object of the exercise is to keep students in and make them successful — a totally different proposition requiring a totally different approach. Up 'till now colleges would simply accept the grades presented by new students and allow them to opt for a two-year pre-medical programme for instance, if they were aiming to become medical doctors.

In California, because we are now having to address the problem of what is called the under-prepared student, we have something called matriculation, which means that students must go through an advice and testing process. Depending upon the results of their tests, students may be told to undertake some fundamental courses before taking up their selected major. To call students unprepared is not to say that their parents did not prepare them. It is to identify a problem for us as educationalists.

In the Los Angeles Metropolitan District, 47 per cent of community college students are immigrants — that is, they are not the products of American schools and it is possible that they will not have spent sufficient time on mathematics, geometry, etc. When such students score low on a test it does not mean they are stupid, it is just that they have not been exposed to the type of questions we are asking.

Several years ago I chaired a competition sponsored by the Bank of America worth $1000 each for the five most competent mathematics students. Out of a metropolitan population of 4.5 million all five winners were Vietnamese, none of whom spoke English. This may suggest that we are educating a generation which is extremely advanced in the natural sciences but which is untutored in the culture and language of the land they want to stay in and learn in.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

We assume as teachers that our assignment is to teach homogeneous groups. But we are now faced with heterogeneous groups, not just in terms of age differentiation and levels of preparedness, but also in cultural terms. Ten years ago the Korean population of LA was 25,000. Now we have 450,000 Koreans. And we have a growing Iranian population, and a large Chinese population. I was once called out on an emergency to Los Angeles City College. The Fire Department was ready to fly me in by helicopter because the Chinese community had chosen the campus to celebrate their New Year. Fire crackers on campus are illegal and dangerous because the buildings could easily ignite. I asked them not to use fire crackers and they duly handed over two tonnes which the Fire Department hauled away. No sooner had we gone than they produced another supply and celebrated in style. The fact that we did not know about and were not prepared to recognise the cultural importance of the celebration was an important matter for us as educationalists.

A two-year college that claims to serve its community has to study its community. In Los Angeles the nature and components of a community are like the weather — changing and moving constantly. Colleges built for a particular neighbourhood with a particular programme in mind can quickly find they are in the wrong neighbourhood serving the wrong programme, unless they rethink their curriculum.

This is a particular problem for an administrator in a district with nine or ten colleges. Over a period of 15 years it is possible that the catchment communities for all the colleges will have changed completely. East Los Angeles College was serving a predominantly Hispanic community, with many Hispanic staff members. Now the oriental community is supplying an increasing number of students — within a year or two the majority of

students will be oriental — yet the personnel of community colleges are supposed to reflect the community they teach.

I believe that institutions of further education will discover that they have to serve particular communities. This brings with it the risk of segregation by demography, where people regard a college as black because it is located in a black area.

A similar problem is the danger of segregation by subject. In the USA, public service is now mainly the domain of black students; oriental students are moving in ever increasing numbers into the fields of science and engineering; and Hispanic students are more interested in advertising and marketing. If we continue to graduate people in these subjects we can predict that in certain metropolitan areas people from one particular cultural or ethnic background are likely to predominate in these career fields.

In America, black, white and oriental students want to go to mixed colleges, so college administrators have the enormous responsibility of developing a curriculum that will attract people on its own merits rather than a college's geographical location.

THE COLLEGE PERSPECTIVE

Quality of students also relates to the institution. We must not confuse the upward mobility of our students with the upward mobility of our institutions. There are a number of two-year colleges in America which would like to become four-year institutions because they are doing so well. This can cause problems in our relationships with four-year institutions which feel threatened when a successful community college makes a bid to become a university.

In the Los Angeles area there is a college which attracts good students because it is beside the beach. This makes it powerful and popular, and the college president wants it to become a four-year institution. My view is that we should learn our limitations, and concentrate quality-wise on issues we can teach, services we can render, and areas in which we feel we can do well.

As an administrator I believe that the difference between business and

education is that business is concerned with profit and education is concerned with the product. Education is much closer to religion because the outcome is more abstract — we are dealing with 'delayed gratification'.

The number of students you put through the system is only one sign of success. There is always the possibility that your students will one day become Nobel Prize winners and have great success in their chosen field. We have no way of knowing.

Business people visiting colleges suggest that cost effectiveness can be improved by doubling class sizes. But for an institution with only teaching responsibilities, the relationship between teacher and student, and having an appropriate ratio, is what leads to quality and students' later success in four-year institutions.

The community college curriculum consists of two elements — a transfer curriculum linked to university requirements, and a vocational curriculum determined by job requirements. In the former case we have now developed a system, in consultation with the universities, which provides students with a general education tailored to their chosen major at degree level, whereas at one time a history major would be free to choose any five of 260 courses on offer at a community college.

There is much closer collaboration between universities and colleges because the drop-out rate from both is very high, less for scholastic reasons than because of student mobility. The average stay of a student in a four-year degree programme is not more than two years, and in a two-year CC programme it is six months. The strength of the community college system is that even after a delay of five years, students can pick up their courses again with ease.

On the vocational side we now have advisory committees, or in the case of nursing, for instance, licensing boards, which determine the range of courses those opting for a particular occupation should complete. In that sense colleges are becoming both more flexible and more precise.

A recent phenomenon in American community colleges has been the growing number of students with university degrees who come back to the two-year college for vocational purposes. They may have majored in a degree such as literature or history which provides them with a general education but leaves them with the problem of how to apply it. In the LA

district 12 per cent of community college students are university graduates. One example of the vocational value of the CC system is a young woman who recently returned to college to take a veterinarian technician programme in order to win a starting salary of $27,000 in her chosen para-profession.

FINANCIAL CONTROL

Issues of quality and flexibility also raise questions about who makes the decisions about how much money colleges are to get.

I am a firm believer in local control. Theoretically it is best for those most directly involved in the consequences of decision making to have authority. They are closer to the classroom and the further you remove decision making from the classroom, the less impact decisions have on the student. And as educationalists we are there to serve the student and the citizen. There is a major political battle going on in California, Texas and elsewhere over this issue. In my experience the politicisation of local control is as dangerous at college level as it is at state or federal levels.

Educationalists and administrators in the United States talk about legislators and their plans for education in much the same way as you are doing in Britain at present, but the difference is that we are the ones who make the decisions on education.

There are colleges in every congressional district in Los Angeles. As a chancellor, if I wanted something I would call on my state legislator and say, 'You represent this institution and this is what we want from you'. If there is a Republican administration, and my Board is Democratic, I will have two lobbies — one directed at the Republicans and another at the Democrats — because as an educator I am responsible for educating students, and both political parties are responsive to me to ensure that the students receive education, and not the other way round. I can spend money on lobbying because the law permits me to. The politicans know the lobbying is matched to the different parties, but they also know that education is a high priority and financial issue.

There is of course a price to pay for local control. My speciality is working on strategies for the future, but if I strayed into areas of macro-management which were not strictly my responsibility as a college chancellor, my

college presidents, deans and directors would quickly point out the error of my ways.

At the same time I have to be a psychiatrist, a fireman, a policeman, and even pay fines to get people out of jail. At least people know who to go to. It is good for people to know the individual to go to when they are angry about something or need the go ahead for something else.

There is an absolute disadvantage in pushing the decision making up to, in our case, federal level, where no one knows who is making the decision. You cannot then complain to an individual about a decision, because you are likely to discover it was taken by computer.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

American community colleges have always been part of adult education, but they are unprepared for adult education in the 21st century. In California they are facing three very significant developments: a shift in demography, a shift in technology, and a shift in life styles.

The good news is that by 1993 we will have 18 per cent more 10-24 year olds than in 1983. But the largest change will come in the number of 35-44 year olds, where there will be a 37 per cent increase. Such changes in age distribution represent a major problem for educators and further education institutions because, in pedagogical terms, we are not prepared to deal with issues such as gerontology. In the USA gerontology is becoming a discipline of the medical sciences, psychiatry, economics, social responsibility, and fundamental vocational skills. Demographic shifts raise special difficulties for the institutional researcher or a strategist seeking to estimate an institution's enrolment potential.

In the Los Angeles metropolitan area the elementary and high school district educates 5-600,000 students. At one time statistical information suggested there was no need for an increase in provision because the birth rate was so low. Yet there was an inflow of 72,000 students in one year in that school district — 55 per cent coming from other states, 15 per cent from other countries, and the rest from other parts of California.

In the same area alone it would be possible to put together a new programme for 40,000 students who are not getting access to much needed tuition in

English as a second language (ESL). But provision is not possible without state funding, and there is political controversy over such new types of provision.

We are in the process of developing a state-wide network for the teaching of ESL. However, if everyone of college age is to attend school as the law requires, our public school facilities are insufficient to support a traditional two-semester educational effort. Yet when LA recently proposed the introduction of year round facilities, the only other option being a major capital construction programme, all hell was let loose.

The problem is that the people who make the decisions on funding are not those whose children are at school, and the issue arose at a time when the governor found it politically convenient to return $1 billion to the voters. That works out at about $50 dollars per head, and you can imagine what a difference that would make if it were invested in capital construction.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

On the technological front we have two competing movements in the USA. On the one hand automation, new technology and the use of robots has meant the loss of 5-7,000,000 jobs. At the same time as America is losing its manufacturing capability, the development of information technology and the service sector is creating employment openings for 6-7,000,000 people. It is an almost one-to-one switch to new skills, which means we have to revise our educational programme to train these people. And that means we must also retrain our faculty.

One of our newest problems is that business and industries are giving us the equipment and machinery they can no longer use, and expect us to train people for the next generation. We are having to say: 'Thank you, but we cannot use your machinery. We will try to buy what we need'.

In this environment there are moves to bring business and industry and the academic faculty together to develop a new ideal called 'the extended academic community'. I do not believe industry will be able to produce its own training programme without the universities and colleges, so it is important to establish a forum where business and industry can get together with further and technical educators to discuss each others' needs.

CHANGING LIFE STYLES

The dominant household on the west coast of America is the single parent family. More people are now divorced or single and still have children. This is a very significant issue, especially if you couple it with the growth in dual-career households.

When teachers at elementary schools phoned pupils' homes recently to ask parents to collect their children because of an earthquake, they found no one in, apart from an answering machine, at 70 per cent of homes. This in itself is a serious matter because it means that teachers in elementary schools are not just teaching children, they are baby sitting, and this must have an impact on the educational cycle and the educational environment.

California is also a major base for those entering retirement. Our good weather attracts people from as far away as Vancouver. I have switched on the radio at my home in Palm Springs and heard snow forecast, only to find that I have picked up a Winnipeg station broadcasting news and stock market reports to its exiles.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The difference between the two-year college and the four-year university is that in community colleges the subjects taught are more precise, more consequential and more cognitive. Colleges have to respond more directly to changing economic conditions.

One of the most interesting comments on American education came in a comparative study of the US and Japanese economies commissioned by the New York Stock Exchange. Examining the challenge represented by Japanese business techniques, it chose to highlight the quality of the Japanese educational system as an explanation for its economic success.

'One of the things the Japanese do right is in schooling their people. The extraordinary effectiveness of their schools is one relatively neglected reason for their high productivity. By comparison our schools are failing to provide our young people with the preparation they need to reach their full productive potential.'

We have to recognise the link between education and success or failure in

other aspects of life. At the time of Sputnik, we saw a massive investment in the national defence and space development programmes. We now face new economic pressures, and our response must be to put more money into education. Our government, however, believes that the educational system would work better in the hands of private enterprise, and federal government is encouraging senior community college staff to set up independent schools covering one or more vocational areas, with the help of venture capital. If they can survive for three years and win accreditation, the government will help to fund students and finance the institution on the grounds that it is more cost effective than the public sector.

We have begun to see the franchising of particular types of schools — once one has been successfully set up, someone else can buy the rights to set up a similar school elsewhere. Already there are some 350 such accredited schemes. However, the cost of further education in general is in the region of $50 billion a year and the cost of private sector business and industrial training is $60 billion. Since much of it is company specific, there are plenty of opportunities for CCs to provide basic training which can then be supplemented by in-house training. For instance, Polaroid has recently turned over all its in-house training to a local community college. This makes for a more flexible work force, improving employment and academic prospects for the individual through the credit transfer system, and allowing companies to find appropriately trained staff if they are to win new orders.

I think it is a myth that private enterprise will take over a substantial segment of our educational system. In the public sector we have the responsibility of educating people for a better life, so that they can appreciate technology in an age when the computer has taken over the jobs of many high school graduates.

We must all work in our different countries to find ways of improving access to education and broadening opportunities for our citizens.

SUCCESS UNDER DURESS — THE COLLEGE AND THE COMMUNITY

Dr Brunetta Reid Wolfman
President, Roxbury Community College
Boston, Massachusetts

Roxbury Community College serves a poor, multi-racial area in the centre of Boston. Some recent anniversaries may help to place us in context. When our city celebrated the 350th anniversary of the Boston Latin School in 1985, the order of the public procession offered its own commentary on American public education. Roxbury, the newest, came at the end. The 350th anniversary of the founding of Harvard was celebrated in 1986. The public procession this time was also a commentary on American higher education. Once again, Roxbury was last.

Last year saw the re-opening and re-dedication of the African Meeting House, on Boston's Beacon Hill, which was first dedicated in 1806. For 181 years it has been the site of educational programmes for black children barred from Boston's public schools. It was the centre of abolitionist activity and de-segregation efforts throughout the last century.

1988 is the 350th anniversary of the arrival of Boston's first African bondsman, and marks the start of continuous residence in the city by people of colour, who now form 30 per cent of Boston's population. 1988 also sees the opening of Roxbury's new permanent campus, after 14 years of temporary locations — from an automobile dealer's showroom through a condemned nursing home to a former state teachers' college.

Roxbury Community College was the dream of local black and Hispanic activists, an offspring of the civil rights and community control movements of the 1960s. At the same time that black parents and community leaders were attempting to achieve equal educational opportunities for elementary

and secondary students they were campaigning for expanded higher educational opportunities, increased enrolments at Boston State College, and for a community college.

In the early 1960s the state took over the support of a couple of municipal junior colleges and established 14 regional community colleges which were to serve students within commuting distance.

The one college planned for Boston was set in an insular, Irish, working class neighbourhood which was hostile to people of colour. There had been violence before and during school de-segregation, and even Caucasian gentrifiers found it uncomfortable.

Eventually Roxbury won its own college, and grudging approval was given to a small budget. The community wanted one of their own to run their college, but the state authorities chose an experienced administrator from outside to establish the campus. He lasted less than a year. There were other difficulties which stemmed from the college board's lack of a clearly defined 'mission', and the state's tolerance of poor administrative practices. Many of the staff had served in the Peace Corps, and the highly individualised academic programme reflected their perceptions of the community's needs.

The greatest credit must go to the students who had clear ideas about their goals and persisted in demanding recognition of their aspirations. It was achieving accreditation that forced the college to reconsider its curriculum and introduce better administrative procedures. Federal funds were obtained to develop academic support programmes, tutorial assistance and computerised instruction. In recent years we have used such external stimuli as planning tools to define our objectives and improve our resources.

By 1986 the results had begun to show. Approximately 40 per cent of our students were transferring to four-year institutions. We keep in touch with them and they let us know about the difficulties they encounter. In this way we are able to prepare other students to move on to such institutions.

TEACHING FROM STRENGTH

One example of how we have applied grant-funding in staff development has been an approach we call 'teaching from strength', based on the

'ethnographic' work of the Stanford University anthropologist Shirley Brice-Heath.

This project taught the staff to look at the people in their classes and begin to understand what they have brought with them to the college. One maths teacher noticed that all the students from the Horn of Africa sat in one place, all those from the English-speaking Caribbean sat in another, as did those from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and the American Blacks. There was no interchange between them and part of the reason for this was that she talked too much. So she began to think about what she could do to get them more involved.

The project made the staff much more self-conscious, and much more conscious of their students. By writing articles and holding conferences they were able to share the results of the project with teaching colleagues around the country. We are now using the same approach with some secondary school teachers in Boston.

Using funds from foundations and corporations to hire the supervisory staff and provide students with a small stipend, we have developed programmes for what we call internships to provide students with work experience. We have since been able to expand the scheme and employ counsellors to work with the students, with the aid of a federal grant for co-operative education.

We have used special funds to help us in partnerships with high schools. We run a couple of 'upward-bound' programmes, one in conjunction with a nearby private technological institution, to prepare poor Black and Hispanic students for college, and to involve their parents, who for the most part have been shut out by the public school system. We focus on science and maths. The students come every afternoon, after school, on Saturdays, during their school holidays, and for a six-week residential programme.

We have also used state money for additional tutors and federal minority science improvement funds to employ extra staff and to purchase equipment which we could not buy using state funds.

We have contracted with state agencies to do particular training programmes, for instance in computer-assisted draughting. They helped us to purchase equipment along with private corporations because we are not able to buy it without the support of the corporate sector. We have been able to train displaced shipyard workers so that they can set up their own small

companies. We have been contracted to do job training for the city and the state, providing short-term training and then trying to move some of the trainees on to longer-term academic programmes.

We have used the state budget to help to discipline ourselves, and tied it into our (corporate) plan. This has not been easy, because ours was an institution where everyone was used to asking a dean for odd bits of money or new staff members. We have tried to make every unit responsible for its own budget.

In the process we have had to determine what our strengths are and concluded that one of our greatest strengths is that we are in a city. To most people in Massachussets, Boston is a dirty word — it is where all the corruption and crime and traffic problems are. For us it is a resource that we can draw upon, and we provide access for people living in the city to a larger community. So we have stressed that, instead of being ashamed of living in Boston, we must see it as a wonderful opportunity, for us, for the city and for the state.

DIVERSITY BRINGS STRENGTH

We see the racial and cultural diversity of the area as another great strength. Ninety three per cent of our students are people of colour: about 58 per cent are Afro-American, Afro-Caribbean or African, and 29 per cent are Hispanic from all the Spanish-speaking countries. About five per cent are Caucasians who are not used to being in the minority, so we have to deal with them in a special way (we call this affirmative action!). The remainder are Asian and middle eastern.

With some 40 native languages spoken, we have to negotiate cultural and linguistic differences to create an environment in which students and staff can learn. That is what we mean by a learning environment. The staff are not allowed just to teach, they have to learn too.

We have students aged from 18 to 82. Those who are over 65 get free tuition and they just keep taking courses. That is wonderful because it provides a balance, it helps them stay young, and it helps our younger students learn something about the ageing process.

Most of our students are single heads of households. Fifty nine per cent of

our students are women, and the average student has 1.5 children, which may explain why there is a problem of discontinuous/interupted education. Many young women dropped out of school at 16 or before, because they were pregnant. Students often drop out for a term to have a baby, yet still know little about the facts of life because teaching such things is not approved of in Boston. We are trying to do something about this in ways that will not be offensive to the powers that be.

Our students are on low incomes, most of them below the poverty line. About 50 per cent work full time, some of them work full time plus. They go to school, work afternoon and evening shifts and race home to see that their kids get off to school. These people have a real sense of why they are in college and what the value of education is. About 49 per cent of them come without a high school diploma but with an equivalent certificate, which means that even though they might have been poor high school students they would, at least, have picked up some learning habits.

We believe that our small size is extremely valuable. We have about 3,500 students in credit courses, about 1,500 of whom are not on campus but in literacy programmes throughout the city, and about 500 on contract training programmes. We try to treat them all the same and talk of ourselves as being a community, a family. We personalise what we do and our class sizes are small. On our new campus the class rooms will hold only 20 students and if we need to expand, we shall just have to persuade the state to build another classroom building.

We stress tutorials and seminars where students can stay together from entry in a group that is their own, with the same seminar leader, so that they can learn study skills and work through all the problems associated with college life together. We continually revise our advising system so that the staff can provide a thorough service.

SEIZING THE TIME

At a time of so-called full employment our aim is to get as many employable people onto the labour market at possible. One has only to walk or drive around central Boston to know that we do not have real full employment. There are plenty of people without jobs. Some have never worked, others have worked only temporarily. They don't show up in the statistics, so they don't count. These are the people we are mainly concerned about.

Having built partnerships with business and industry we are now training people for first jobs and retraining those who have been displaced. We have Chinese garment workers who have been in the country for a long time and never spoken English; their industry is returning to where they came from, so we have devised an eight-month programme to train them in English and prepare them for the job market. That is the sort of thing we can do and have done. Such problems are becoming common because Boston is losing its manufacturing base, and we have to prepare people to move into the service sector.

With a reduced number of 18 year olds until around the mid-1990s, we also see the current period as a window of opportunity for continued higher education. Whereas a few years ago the private educational institutions did not want older students, poor students, black or Hispanic students, now they are coming to us to negotiate transfer agreements. We have raised money so that our students have 'dowries' to take to these institutions, making them even more popular. And because there is something at the other end for our students, we have been able to improve the quality of the instruction we offer.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

When I first came to the college and met members of the staff I asked one business instructor where his students went after they had finished their course. He said they went back home and back on welfare. I was furious with him, but he was ex-Peace Corps and really did not see that anything he was doing would make any difference. Now that we have injected a sense of mission into the college, his students are going out to work and his teaching and the attitudes of many other members of the staff have improved. Some might say that one reason for the improvement is that we have bribed them by supporting their demand for improved salaries, which are negotiated state-wide, and by finding money for them to go on courses and conferences and to buy material they could not otherwise afford.

We have convinced Northeastern University and Harvard Extension to provide free graduate courses. At Northeastern we have three faculty members on graduate programmes each year. We set a two-year limit on these courses, giving them enough time to work on their doctorate before opening up the opportunity to someone else. I hope eventually to have

similar arrangements with all the higher education institutions in the region to ensure that all our staff members will be able to obtain graduate degrees.

RACISM

Of the many problems we face the biggest is the effect of racism. Not only is our college stigmatised because we serve people of colour and low status, but we must also cope with the impact of racism on self-perceptions — the internalisation of inferiority, low expectations and self-denigration.

We have to spend a lot of time saying to staff and students: 'You are capable, you do have the potential. We know you can do it'. I am constantly impressed by the talent of our students who have been told for years that they are stupid, that they have no future, that they can not do anything. We continually have to try and find the key to unlock their talents and their confidence. If there were an easy solution we could codify it, market it and make a lot of money.

We also have to deal with the problem of group and institutional marginality — the feeling of powerlessness that comes from being a minority person in the United States. This is a real drain on an institution because it crops up in so many ways and has to be combated continually. We have to keep convincing the state government that we deserve support, because they were not convinced that they should support us from the outset. And we have a continual fight to get state and federal support for our students, much of it at political and activist level — trying to persuade them that student grants are inadequate to cover living costs for poor people.

Then there is the whole problem of student loans — one of the worst things that has been inflicted on American higher education in the past decade. It is simply a means of passing on debts to the future, an extra burden for people on low incomes — whatever their colour.

ADMINISTRATION

Another problem has been getting our administrative and fiscal procedures right. The college started off with poor administrative practices. At first Roxbury's attitude towards academic record-keeping was very casual, so we had to make improvements there. Faculty expectations of students were

low, and standards were influenced by the feeling that these people were not going to get anywhere. So you get a self-fulfilling prophecy — if students are going to get nowhere, what difference does it make what grade they get; but if they get low grades they are not going to get financial assistance that might allow them to achieve more. We have also had to grasp the problems of corruption that can creep in when administrative systems are not operated properly.

Another major problem area has been the push towards centralisation. Massachusetts has a wonderful tradition of reorganising higher education whenever the legislature feels unhappy about it. No one invests too much in structures because next year you could be operating a different system and reporting to a different body.

There is an attempt to take over some of the responsibilities of local trustees, and to standardise us by sending in external programme reviewers to look at our liberal arts and business studies programmes in addition to regional accreditation. Three years ago the state authority decided our business programmes needed more staff, more money and a better curriculum — then offered $500 to see what improvements could be made. We don't take them too seriously and try to keep them away from us.

We also have to deal with the question of internal structure and how to incorporate unions and the kind of collegiate governance that has long been a part of American higher education. At Roxbury we have the most complex governance structure in the state. Because Roxbury's roots lie in community control and participation, everybody has to play a part in making every decision. When I first went to the college I had to deal with grievances about moving the photocopier and the mail boxes without consultation.

We have an assembly for clerical and maintenance workers, an assembly for professional staff, a student government, an assembly for the teaching staff and one for administrative staff. The union keeps trying to consolidate, but we have to point out that when management issues are discussed they keep adjourning and reconvening as union groups. They insist on having three people in charge of each assembly, one of whom is a union person who keeps an eye on the other two. We are trying to simplify our internal system of governance and to involve the trustees, who are responsible for policy, without getting them caught up in the middle. Our hope is to devise a structure as stylish as our new buildings.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE COMMUNITY

We have found it essential to get involved with the community. It was part of the strategy I worked out when I went to Roxbury. It had been isolated and embattled, pitied and ignored and the college had to become an integral part of the community, not just in sentiment but in reality. As a consequence we have all been involved in local committees in an attempt to break the isolation and become more visible in the community. I recently realised I was serving on 40 local committees!

We have become involved in adult literacy programmes, something I resisted at first because it was not collegiate. I took it on eventually because I thought it was important to provide the community with a service. Now we have a continuum from literacy through general education development certificates and pre-college studies to traditional academic transfer and vocational education.

We are part of a retention consortium of neighbouring institutions, working together to ensure that as the number of minority and low income students increases, they receive help to keep up their studies. We are also part of a higher education partnership with Boston public schools, where all the institutions in Boston share their expertise to help improve the service offered to students at the public schools. This means that as a college we are visible in and a part of the city's higher education community.

We have established relationships with community agencies and, with the help of a small grant, we have been able to write 'articulations' with several such bodies — international institutions, Spanish speaking agencies, a Creole-speaking agency. These 'linking agreements' explain what students will get from the agency, primarily in terms of ESL or basic education, what they will have when they come to us, and what we will do for them. It provides them with a very clear pathway from the community into the college.

We have another partnership with Boston Urban Gardeners, who obtained finance from the housing authority to work with local residents on horticultural and environmental issues. We now have an academic programme in urban environmental operations, with projects that include cleaning up the harbour and green space that needs care. This will provide work for students who live in the city.

In the same way we developed our programme in catering and hotel management. The city told the hotel and restaurant trade that they could not build new hotels unless they employed specific percentages of women, local residents and minorities. We were there waiting, ready to set up training programmes for the people they would have to employ.

Similarly when the Massachusetts housing finance administration realised how few black or Hispanic property managers there were, we became the vehicle through which they could meet their affirmative action goals. Less than one per cent of the nursing force in Massachusetts is from minorities and that is a problem which we are attempting to address through a nursing programme set up in conjunction with the hospitals and the University of Massachusetts.

We have established a separate foundation, composed of people whose names carry clout in the city, representing corporate Boston, social services Boston and old Boston. Their interest and involvement give the college greater credibility. In 1986 we raised $178,000 in an annual fund which goes towards scholarships, staff development, equipment and the athletic programme. We are now starting a $3 million endowment campaign, which is big for a college of our type, size and location. No other institution in Roxbury is so endowed.

We have collaborated with business, hospitals, higher education, indeed with anyone who will collaborate with us. It is absolutely essential that a small community college like Roxbury, which is governed by and serves people of colour, should be seen as an integral part of the city — as a partner and a collaborator — to counteract the indifference, the benign neglect and the malicious acts of state and private prejudice.

In order to ensure the survival and continuance of the college we are dependent upon external relationships. We need all the friends we can get.

PREPARING FOR CHANGE: ACCESS AND PROGRESSION

Frank Griffiths
Education Secretary, National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE)

One of the most difficult things for the British visitor to come to terms with is the sheer volume and scale of the American further and higher educational systems. Like the country it is vast, and it is also very successful — at some point in their lives most American citizens will have passed through the system as students.

In trying to answer why and how the American system appears to succeed in providing access and progression for so many students, I would first acknowledge that it has a great deal to do with American culture. But its success is also to do with the greater coherence of its structures, particularly in large states such as California, and I would argue that its responsiveness, not least to the needs of individuals, has forced the American system to provide its 'offer' on a much more flexible basis than is the case in Britain.

The major structural changes that are about to be imposed on the British educational systems provide part of the backdrop against which we need to set the lessons we can learn from the American system. I believe that we need to stimulate radical changes in the curricula we 'offer' and the way in which we facilitate movement within and between institutions in response to these changes.

RESOURCES

A second part of the backdrop is the clear indication in the White Paper on higher education that access to HE should be increased by some 50,000 full

time equivalent (FTE) students by the 1990s. However welcome such an increase may be, it is made all the more formidable by the fact that there is no guarantee that it will be backed up with a real increase in resources. Para 1.8 of the HE White Paper (1987) concludes with what I regard as a model of both ambiguity and clarity: 'The Government is confident that the arrangements for 1987-88 and prospectively for the following two years, set out in the Government's expenditure plans (Command 56), provide the various sectors with the basis for fulfilling their roles to a higher level of achievement'.

That is the only reference made to resources — but it is enough. My reading of it is that we have to operate from the assumption that there will be no increase in resources, but we shall be expected to increase access. We must also assume that the Government's proposed changes will be in place on schedule, which means that by 1989 we shall have a radically different system of further and higher education for the four parts of the United Kingdom, with two sectors defined in statute — a new university sector and a new HE sector.

In England there will be some 80 independent HE institutions funded and 'planned' by the Polytechnic and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) with no course approval and no course planning mechanisms, operating within defined geographical areas but relying for the most part on whomever they can attract as clients.

It would appear that Welsh HE institutions, outside the university sector, will remain within the local authority framework; in Scotland the situation will remain unchanged, although a Scottish Committee of the Universities Funding Council (UFC) indicates some concessions to the Scottish dimension; and the system in Northern Ireland is expected to remain largely unchanged.

There is a third element in the backdrop to what we should perhaps call maintained FE. In England and Wales it is proposed that there should be greater devolution of responsibility to the individual colleges with, indeed, the suggestion of corporate status for some colleges. In other words we can anticipate a disaggregated, diverse system which will not be subject to a national agency, nor have the benefit, or suffer, from the existence of the two HE funding councils, which will be contracting with their own client institutions and contracting with individual local authorities outside those spheres. The maintained FE 'system' will instead rely upon some degree of

consultation between those two major planning bodies for England and the local authority associations.

Ignoring for the moment the changes planned for the compulsory education sector or the future of the proposed city technology colleges, in my view it is a staggering achievement by the Government to have devised a structurally incoherent FHE system for a country smaller than the state of California but with a population twice the size. To think our way through that structural incoherence we need to consider what the changes mean in terms of increasing not just access to, but progression through the various levels of further and higher education.

MISSION

The colleges which will constitute our new FHE 'system' need to be clear about their 'mission', particularly those in the 'third estate' of maintained FE which, as a category, appears to have been an after thought on the part of the Government. Crucially, but not solely, that 'sector' needs to be brought in systematically as part of an over-all increase in access and progression.

I do not believe that we should mirror the formative days of the American community college system, and re-cast the mission of maintained FE solely in the shadow of HE, since what were once somewhat patronisingly called junior colleges now not only have a vertical relationship with four-year universities, but have developed a range of horizontal links to local industry, commerce and the community.

It would appear that less than 10 per cent of community college students in America transfer to four-year institutions, so it would be an entirely inappropriate reading of the American experience to suggest that our colleges can exist solely by fulfilling that kind of functional relationship with HE.

The strength of the British FE system is that our colleges already have the horizontal links in full measure, but I would argue that its weakness at the moment, compounded by the changes about to take place, is that while there are elements of vertical progression from FE into HE they are: (a) insufficient to provide for the increase in access and progression we

require, and the Government requires of us; and (b) that they are at risk because of the forthcoming structural changes.

For example, there will be undoubted pressure towards greater concentration of HE work within this new ring-fenced sector, (or in both ring-fenced sectors — the UFC as well) a process likely to gather momentum and to be consolidated when colleges become new institutions and the PCFC gets its first pound to spend on contracting. As one of our American colleagues has put it, 'The first dollar is the critical dollar'. The first pound laid contractually by the PCFC is the critical pound, and could be the start of an almost unstoppable process of transferring the bulk of existing full time AFE work into those new PCFC institutions.

ACCESS TO HE

Increased access to HE is only going to come about if we manage to forge links between otherwise disparate and competing elements. If the structural arrangements do not provide a means, then we have to create curriculum-based means. The only way forward is by a rigorous, rapid and national extension of both credit transfer and credit accumulation, with all that that entails by way of a thorough modularisation of the curriculum both at pre-HE level and in HE itself.

The implications are enormous both at college level, where a new approach to student services will be required, and for some of our most cherished and unquestioned assumptions about the coherence and integrity of the subject-based degree.

Much of what I would encourage would be painful for British HE, which has so far coped fairly conservatively with larger student numbers. If we are serious about extending credit, the changes required will have to permeate even our own versions of Harvard.

What then should characterise the British system? First we need carefully to distinguish between credit transfer and credit accumulation. To borrow a definition from a NAB report on credit transfer systems and credit accumulation: credit transfer means the provision for students to move between courses leading to major HE qualifications, such as degrees or diplomas, without loss of time or with minimal loss of time; such movement can be within or between institutions. Credit accumulation means the

facility for students to take short programmes of study, expressed as units or modules which, for the individual student, lead to credits.

There also needs to be a clearly structured arrangement whereby individual credits can be accumulated towards major qualifications. The challenge to HE, arguably greater than for FE, is to begin to embrace the implications of credit accumulation. It is the more radical development, since the accumulation of credits need not require an advance decision by a student to invest in them; nor need credit recognition be solely the property of the college.

It is at its most radical when life experience — or experiential learning — is included in the additive process. The implications for the system are far reaching indeed, but I firmly believe that we have no alternative but to begin to embrace them.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

If we commit ourselves to enhancing access by the adoption of credit transfer/credit accumulation for the UK, we need to establish certain basic princples. The first of these is comprehensiveness, the second is universality — terms that sound very similar and not terribly formidable. In practice they mean that we start from the assumptions that all courses are in principle capable of adaptation to credit transfer and credit accumulation, and that whatever we do, we seek to do it on a national basis.

Set against the incoherence likely to obtain in the future, these two principles seem formidable but I suggest that anything less would sell our system short and not deliver the kind of access the Government envisages and we should wish to provide.

There are threats and challenges in all of this, and here I would draw directly upon the American experience. In the US there is an apparent obsession with the accumulation of credits — it even permeates the attitudes of high school teachers and students. In some states it is actually possible for students to gain credit recognition from four-year programmes simply by virtue of outstanding scholastic success at high school. At first glance this may seem shocking; viewed from Britain it is analogous to universities doing deals with school students.

On reflection, however, there is already a great deal of duplication and overlap in the combination of intensively structured 'A' levels and very tightly defined three-year first degrees, principally because of the narrowness of the curriculum offer. The first year of many degree courses is one of great frustration, for students and teachers, as great chunks of the syllabus repeat what has already been covered in 'A' level courses.

To me the challenge for HE is to broaden the offer, avoid needless duplication of the pre-HE experience and invest more in good quality graduate programmes.

The corollary for HE and FE is to restructure the offer on a modular basis as far as possible, and in the process bring in both vocational and general education. This is going to cause great consternation within the British academic community, not least in the established universities, and many will protest that damage will be done to 'coherence and progression'. But unless we are prepared not only to gear up our structures and render them more coherent, but also alter our curriculum, the impact of the credit system will be minimal.

VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION

Let me end by raising another issue- validation and accreditation — that poses the British system with significant problems in the future.

We can look forward to a system with a large number of more autonomous institutions, autonomous in the legal sense, in a competitive sense and also, tragically, largely autonomous in an academic sense. In the system of the immediate future British universities, polytechnics and major HE colleges will be self-validating. CNAA has been rolled back, BTEC is now in the sights of those colleges, and if you talk to many of the senior figures in the polytechnics and colleges which will make up the new system they conclude from the fact that the Inspectorate are not allowed into universities, that neither should they be allowed into polytechnics and colleges.

So the move towards academic self-validation is becoming one of the driving forces of this period, in contrast to the US where even the most established universities, public and private, are part of regional accreditation groups. It might be purely notional, but even the greatest of American universities — Berkeley, UCLA, Harvard, Yale and Princeton

— are part of a mutually sustaining process involving formal recognition of their standing as HE institutions. Moreover, community colleges are also involved in the process.

I am not suggesting that the US system is perfect, but contrast it with the UK system where institutions seek nothing more than external examiners. If we are to forge properly articulated links between the disparate elements of the future then, as a minimum, we need to lay down some basic ground rules applicable to all. A general system of accreditation common to all institutions seeking to participate in a credit accumulation arrangement is an indispensable minimum and, in my view, ought to be a condition of public funding.

That represents a pretty formidable challenge — there are some powerful vested interests in British education — but it ought to be high on the agenda for both the new funding councils. Quite apart from these major 'macro' questions of how you change the curriculum, it also raises the question of what role an agency like NCVQ will play in the process, and highlights the other major issue confronting college faculty and staff — the provision of student services.

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STUDENT SERVICES IN THE USA

Geoffrey Melling

One of the features of community colleges in Boston and Los Angeles which struck us as being more prominent and more important than in British colleges was the provision of support services for students. Especially where there is open access, these student services are at the core of the college operation.

The assistance offered in our colleges has a much more modest function, as probably befits a system where the courses are for the most part pre-set, established programmes, where there are often entry levels, and where students move in lock-step through a programme. It is not possible to drop out for two or three weeks and then come back at the same point at which you left. In Britain a student who is ill for three months is likely to lose a year — circumstances which suggest that we do not need the same kind of support system witnessed in the United States.

Certainly on the comparative evidence we gained, in simple money terms Britain invests much less in the provision of guidance and support for students. In the US we found offices and office holders for entry counselling and registration, for continuing academic advice, for record keeping, for information on attainment and transfer, for financial aid, and for personal guidance. The staff were professionals in their own right, administrators rather than teachers, whom we found to be often healthily critical about the teaching staff.

It seemed clear to us that the pivotal position of these services in community colleges is the 'flip side' of the structural flexibility which operates in many

of the programmes that students follow in the US, and open access is the principle on which the modern community college movement stands.

These student services provide the human side which helps to articulate the curriculum element within and between institutions - offering students a series of boats, as it were, to ferry them between the island and the mainland; and which displays the commitment of community colleges to taking on and preparing students whom we would regard as underprepared or even unprepared for college entry.

There is an unfortunate tendency among community colleges to put the blame on the high schools for students' unpreparedness, something we may recognise here, but given an average entry age of 25 it seems unfair to blame the high schools entirely, just as it would be unfair to expect students of that age to have retained all the skills and knowledge derived from a much earlier period of education if they had not been using them in the meantime.

'REMEDIATION'

We certainly felt that the community colleges set about 'remediation', what we might call developmental education, with a will. If you have ever open doors, older students, and a lack of confidence in the basic schooling in the country, you clearly have to do something, and the community colleges were doing far more than we do for our clients. If you do not, you stand to take three risks, about which the community colleges were very clear: either you risk alienating and so losing large numbers of potential students; or you fail a lot of them, and lose those who become disheartened; or you so lower your standards to ensure that all your students get through, that any certificates you offer become meaningless.

These latter courses of action, either failing all the students or passing them all, contain great dangers for the British and American educational systems, given the type of political administrations we both have at present. We are likely to be accused of lack of quality and lack of excellence, and as your reputation drops in the eyes of those who provide the finance, employ your students or take them into the next stage of education, so the danger of losing funding increases.

For such reasons the colleges we visited tended to have huge individualised

learning centres, well stocked with materials of different kinds and varying levels of difficulty, well staffed with multi-skilled teachers and well used by students. There did not seem to be a stigma attached to attending these centres, nor did they look like large 'withdrawal' classes for those with learning difficulties (a phrase often used in Britain to imply that one group of students is significantly less well endowed mentally than the rest of us). Most of the other patterns of support we saw related to the major phenomenon of part time attendance by older students who may not read or write English, or who are single, working parents, and poor. I imagine we in Britain will see a shift towards a similar pattern in the 1990s, with more older students and more of the population whom we have not previously served. It will not be the result of a moral crusade — simple self-interest at a time of falling numbers of young people will be sufficient to dictate that colleges seek out more adult students, just as we shall hope that simple self-interest will dictate that students seek us out.

We should therefore be giving careful consideration to the establishment of regional guidances centres at the heart of our operations, where:

— potential students can be introduced to the educational map of our institutions, in a 'user-friendly' fashion;

— where an adult's ambitions and goals (which may be accurate so far as their experience informs them, but which may change and expand once they learn more about what is on offer and what they can do) can be discussed before entry and en route through a programme of study;

— where such financial assistance as might be available can be explained; and

— where they can receive help to negotiate their way into other parts of the educational system (from child care provision to pre-course language classes), or (back) into the labour market.

COLLEGES AND EMPLOYERS

Dr Ernest Theodossin
Deputy Director, Responsive College Programme
Further Education Staff College

The Responsive College Programme (RCP) is a national FHE marketing programme funded by the MSC and run from the Further Education Staff College. Over a three and a half year period the RCP is developing resources and techniques to improve both the marketing and the quality and relevance of courses provided by local authority colleges. The focus of the programme is a 'product cycle' combining market research, product development/sales and promotion, quality control, and after-sales service. The cycle has been and is being tested and refined in 21 locally based projects.

The RCP is managed by a national steering committee dominated by civil servants and local authority employers; therefore, in running our projects, we moved towards the idea of employer-dominated local steering committees, though some of our projects have had difficulty in finding employer representatives.

The programme began as a response to the 1984 White Paper, **Training for jobs**, and started with the intention of making colleges more responsive to employer needs. Nationally the programme has tended to drift towards a pre-occupation with the internal needs of colleges, and to redress this we initiated a series of employer-led conferences at which teachers and administrators can confront employer needs and employer perceptions of colleges.

In an effort to learn how overseas systems were confronting similar problems, I undertook a North American study tour in the autumn of 1986. This involved a brief visit to a Canadian college and a fortnight in community colleges in California. What struck me as most dramatically

different was the role of employers. They were to be found in the centre of most work-related activity. They were powerful and could impact on what went on in the institutions. At the equivalent of one of our college-employer liaison committee meetings, an employer took the chair and ran the proceedings, calling upon teachers and students for reports, as required.

The contrast with the British scene has encouraged me to examine how employers' needs and perceptions look from inside our colleges, and the various forms of employer contact that are open to FHE institutions. This whole area is really rather messy — there are many anecdotes and assertions, but little hard evidence about employers' reactions to colleges and college responsiveness, and it is often difficult to separate rhetoric from reality. Some colleges claim they are achieving miracles, but those for whom they claim to be achieving them do not always agree.

WHAT DO COLLEGES WANT FROM EMPLOYERS?

First and foremost colleges want business from employers, but it is not always true that the kind of business employers can supply is what all college staff value most. If you looked around the 35 or so colleges associated with the RCP, you would find that some lecturers value full time students rather more than the part time kind, and are more concerned with gaining business from disadvantaged and disabled or ethnic minority or unemployed students.

The second thing colleges want from employers is information. Colleges seek to identify employer needs because the trends they encompass reveal opportunities and threats. There is some disgruntlement that employers do not seem to be very good at identifying future developments. Sometimes companies may 'know' but be reluctant to say. For instance, our Doncaster project has close links with British Coal. For many years the college has hoped that BC would be more open about what kind of developments it sees in terms of training needs, but that is linked to the highly sensitive political issue of pit closures — so the college has often been the last to know about BC's plans. Interestingly enough, one of our Doncaster co-ordinators previously worked with BC, and the company is now prepared to be much more open than it had been in the past.

The third thing colleges want of employers is legitimisation, the endorsement of courses, work placements and, eventually, jobs for the

students they have trained. It sometimes appears that this is one of the major functions employers are supposed to fulfil.

WHAT DO EMPLOYERS WANT FROM COLLEGES?

Employers appear primarily to want colleges to provide training of present and future staff, and trainees for work placement - though there are questions about whether this simply represents a form of cheap labour. Some show an interest in contributing to the community, which may be a mixture of altruism and ego-gratification, but it does bring employers into colleges to work on collaborative projects.

How do colleges and employers meet? One way is through bringing companies into colleges, for instance on governing bodies. Not much information emerges through this route, and I suspect that it has largely been used to legitimise the activities of the college. Whether or not it generates much business for the college, I am uncertain.

When the RCP started the CBI, which is represented on our national steering committee, was concerned about the erratic nature of employer representation on boards of governors, which can be none or one in some places, and a much larger number in others. The expectation of the recent Green Paper is that there will be more employer representation on the boards of governors, perhaps because they will have more control over the finance and direction of colleges. Whether or not employers will take up these seats is another question — certainly some of our projects have indicated that governors seem worried about having financial responsibility and would prefer to operate without the burden of public accountability.

ADVICE AND CONSULTATION

Employer contact also occurs through advisory committees which are intended to feed information into the course provision process, provide legitimisation and open up business opportunities for colleges. However, colleges in 10 local authorities funded as part of the College Employer Links Project (CELP) in 1985-86 reported that the traditional form of advisory committees was not very effective, and employers accused colleges of being inflexible, especially in terms of delivery.

I was reminded of this when I visited the private sector training agency Sight and Sound, which teaches people keyboard skills. There you can start courses twice a week, and there are special rates for slack periods. Compare this with college practices: in one college catchment area where the MSC had identified a large number of people who were to be made redundant but who could be employed if they developed keyboard skills, the college told people in February to come back in September when the typing courses started. They were eventually shamed into making provision, but the example illustrates one criticism laid against the FE system by employers.

CELP also commented on the poor physical impression which colleges give, and noted that the demands made on employers in advisory committees tend to be very limited. We videoed engineering and business studies liaison committee meetings at one college where all the employers were expected to do was listen to reports about how successful the college had been in the past year. CELP did suggest that employers should be given specific tasks to do, but did not identify what those tasks might be.

Another problem with this approach is that however many firms operate within a catchment area, there will be only a handful of employer representatives, and difficulties arise about the different needs of small and large employers and how you define small and large. The committees are often said to be teacher dominated, and the issue of commercial confidentiality can also impede their effectiveness.

Another variation of the advisory committees is the LEA-run employment sector working group where representatives from all the colleges providing courses in the sector meet with relevant employers. These share much the same problems as the advisory committees, but with the additional complication that each college can appear to be competing for custom with the others.

When I recently visited California to look into their approach to marketing, I came across an interesting arrangement in San Diego where there were 115 advisory committees, each concentrating on particular courses and programmes. They were run by eight specialist staff employed in the district office. Employers appeared to have real teeth. Their terms of reference gave them the power to determine curricula, devise new ones and alter existing curricula, and to set standards. My guess is that this type of activity, which would help to define specific tasks for employers, would not

be welcome in Britain where most colleges prefer employers to continue to legitimise their activities rather than 'interfere' in their work.

Perhaps the least successful technique for engaging employers is the Open Day. There are many tragic stories of wasted energy. When one RCP project decided to hold an Open Evening from 4-7 pm, because there had been criticism that colleges expected employers to attend during the working day, not a single employer turned up. This was hardly surprising since it was held on a summer evening in the middle of a big city where there are more attractive options for employers than attending what they would regard as a business exhibition exercise.

Workshops are another way of contacting employers. Lincolnshire RCP project chose an enterprising approach by putting on demonstrations of the latest commercial materials. To attract hairdressers a shampoo manufacturer was invited to demonstrate a new shampoo, and computers were demonstrated for those interested in information technology. Instead of holding them in unwelcoming college buildings, the project arranged one event in an attractive annexe near the town centre, and the other in a hotel. They charged the employers £8 each and managed to get 200 hairdressers along. The big mistake, perhaps, was not to charge but to pay the manufacturers, who were effectively making a sales pitch to a captive audience of potential customers. For part of the day employers came together in small groups to discuss future training needs with college staff.

Then there are college-provided lunches and dinners for employers — in Lancashire they have even tried business breakfasts — where the colleges lay on a meal, perhaps in a training restaurant where students can supply the food, and the employers contribute by sharing information about their industrial sector training needs.

VISITING EMPLOYERS

Clearly the most effective means of making contact with employers is for college staff to visit them at their place of business. Person to person contact encourages the development of good working relationships. The success of this approach stems from the belief that most selling occurs through direct personal contact, rather than through the distribution of advertising literature. Our analysis (Theodossin & Thomson 1987) of 2,500 student questionnaires showed that only four per cent reached the college through

advertising — the overwhelming majority learned about their courses through employers, careers officers, teachers and schools.

Visits to employers have many drawbacks, however.

— They are enormously expensive, especially if done by lecturers. There are examples of senior college staff carrying out such visits (in East Sussex heads of department carried out 200 such interviews over an 18 month period); phone calls are sometimes used as a means of reducing costs, but not all lecturers are good at using the phone.

— They can provide only a tiny sample, and not even a statistically valid one given that catchment areas overlap and can contain 15-20,000 employers.

— They tend to favour the larger employers, from whom colleges anticipate more business.

— Visits are not always welcomed by employers, especially as many may be inundated with researchers seeking labour market information, and it is not always possible to see the right person.

— There is the added risk that lecturers may be asked to do jobs for the employers, from giving advice on health and safety and export licenses to filling our forms and calculating VAT (all have happened on RCP: good news for the employer — a free professional service from the visiting lecturer).

— They have to be regarded as a long term investment since it may be several years before an employer decides to take up college offers.

— Where employer contact is built around individual personalities such as the industrial liaison officer, there is the risk that the whole contact structure will disappear as staff move on.

COLLABORATION

There are also collaborative efforts between colleges and employers, as for

instance in the local collaborative projects (LCPs) where employer and teaching representatives come together to identify training needs.

Up to summer 1987 there had been 475 such LCPs across the country, based in colleges, in local authorities or universities, but they involve external funding and as each project requires approval it is not a system that can be relied upon. There have been LCPs in many of the LEAs where the RCP operates and at least one, in the engineering sector, has developed as a result of the RCP projects in Sheffield. Another interesting scheme is examining ways in which college staff might be seconded to local industry for updating industrial experience.

The Boston Training Association in Lincolnshire represents another collaborative effort. The college has established a private company as a managing agency with the Chamber of Commerce, though there have been problems since the interests of the company and the interests of college have occasionally been perceived to be in conflict.

THE BROKERAGE FUNCTION

Another means of forging links between colleges and employers is through the use of external agents or agencies as intermediaries or 'brokers'. Examples are to be found in local authority economic development units or LEA marketing units. Such schemes operate in RCP projects in Birmingham, Doncaster and Newham, and something similar is to be found in Nottinghamshire. There are special projects like the RCP or PICKUP; there are employer groups such as Chambers of Commerce, managing agents, Enterprise Agencies, and Local Employer Networks (LENs) funded at £2 million by the MSC, all of which attempt to act as intermediaries and identify training needs.

The college company is another innovation which may develop over coming years, and there is the Californian example of the Technology Exchange Centre which operates from the assumption that colleges and employers inhabit different worlds and require an intermediary for mutually beneficial interchange to occur.

One advantage of the 'middle man' approach is that it can be a much more economic way for colleges to gain contact with employers (allowing for the possibility of market research at cheap rates, for instance, and of plugging

into a more extensive database) and can help to focus colleges' efforts more efficiently. But this approach has its drawbacks — a lack of 'ownership' in the eyes of some college staff and a certain sense of resentment about its role.

A distinction has to be drawn between the private intermediaries and those run by the local authority. In Gwynedd, for example, managing agencies are differently perceived by LEA and the colleges. The colleges are quite prepared to let the agency find work for them; having been funded to identify training needs on a consultancy basis, the agency buys in provision from the colleges marks up the cost as its profit and then charges it to the employer. The LEA is less happy because it feels that the colleges should be doing the whole job.

And then there is the LEA variety of brokerage, which is also perceived differently by principals and by LEA officers. There is some feeling that it is excessively interventionist and bureaucratic. In Sheffield for instance, where the city is re-organising to form six tertiary colleges, senior college management has expressed ambivalence about the notion of a central marketing unit.

Finally there are the hybrid modes. None of these approaches exists on its own and most colleges appear to employ one or more of them on an ad hoc, frequently unco-ordinated basis, to make and keep contact with local employers.

OTHER PROBLEMS

All of these methods share key problems with which colleges have to contend. One, as we have seen, is the question of commercial confidentiality. Another is that information provides people with a power base. For instance, in theory most of our projects are planning to develop employer databases which will be set up before a visit takes place and then updated and modified with information gathered on the visit so that others can use it. In practice we have found some reluctance to do that; just as senior staff may withhold information from junior colleagues, so those collecting information may be less than happy to share it. Even linking reimbursement of expenses for visits with provision of database information does not guarantee compliance since many visits involve only modest bus fares which are not always claimed.

There is, of course, another area of employer contact which is often ignored — the vexed question of private enterprise on the part of lecturers. Many college staff run consultancy services themselves — indeed one lecturer actually advertised his own private consultancy in the local authority newspaper (the LEA disapproved but took no action), and others will admit privately that they can double their salary with private work. This hidden economy possibly offers colleges a wider range of employer contacts than the visible, formal systems might at first indicate.

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THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

Geoffrey Melling

In America we found people in an open society who were pleased to discuss what they did, how they did it, and how it might be done better, without hype or defensiveness. Much of what we saw was little different to what we know in the UK. This was no brave new world peopled by strange creatures. Though we did not inspect teaching, there was no evidence from staff or students that it was much different to the average in Britain. It appeared to be good solid stuff, as the HMI report, **NAFE in practice** (DES 1987a), shows ours to be.

Colleges did not seem more efficient; classes were not over large, indeed there was evidence of some emptiness that would have disturbed the Audit Commission over here. On the whole the buildings we saw were better than ours, with wider corridors, bigger lecture theatres, larger halls, but the older buildings were recognisably colleges in the UK sense. Where new buildings were going up they showed that design can be both exciting and incorporate features relevant to a centre for the community. So there is nothing about the heart of the process, the transaction between teacher and taught in buildings provided for that purpose, which is in a different league from our own.

But there is a sharp distinction which concerns the American belief in post-secondary education — the knowledge that they have a right to it. The culture of America is one in which many, if not most, citizens wish to better themselves, and in which education offers them the means to do so. Education helps to make America the melting pot it is. Associated with this is the right to enter post-secondary education for a period, leave it, and go

back later, progressing the while through a number of levels and institutions.

The other big distinction is in structure, control and support, and the clearest visible difference is that post-secondary education appeals to adults. Most Americans stay in school until they are 18, but a great many community college students are over 25 and are therefore picking up educational credits to benefit their working and cultural lives.

Community colleges are similar to our own in that they attract school leavers for both academic and occupational courses. The occupational courses, certainly at craft level, are distinct from the higher technical, scientific and general programmes, and are related directly to employment opportunities and not tied in with any larger educational structure. However, much of what community colleges do is part of the greater unified whole of state-provided higher education.

Subjects are taken in modules or units and the credits which are obtained can be transferred into full degree courses at universities. This flexible structure is ready made for part time attendance and many students take advantage of it. It is not only the young who work their way through college in America. The system encourages access and progression.

Flexibility of this kind brings obligations in its awake. To make it function well you need a range of student advice and support services, the like of which are not found in the UK. Admissions procedures, guidance through a programme, remedial help to get started or catch up, transfer advice, job placement — all seemed much more up front than in the UK. Student services were at the centre of college operations in both Boston and Los Angeles, while here they often appear to be at the margin.

Another corollary to flexibility is the amount of student and management information which community colleges need and collect. Whereas in the UK we are still learning to apply management information systems in colleges, the Americans collect data of all kinds — on age, sex, colour, achievement, progress, placement, etc. Most of this is computerised and some of it is of direct use to the students in judging progress toward their own goals.

American universities generally have departments of institutional research which monitor and evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency, and that

trend has spread to community colleges. Whenever British institutions feel concerned about justifying their existence and measuring their success they should take a look at the kind of data which the average American college can produce on the way it fulfils its mission.

Because of the unitary character of American HE, which embraces research universities, teaching universities and colleges, and the community colleges in state systems with common accreditation, we found the status of academic courses in community colleges to be high. They were also well used because they cost so much less than parallel provision in universities.

British colleges give access to HE by providing programmes which are parallel to those on offer in the final years of school - which marks them out as not being part of HE. Indeed, the general function of the CFE in Britain is to fill the gaps left by other providers in schools, polytechnics, universities and training centres. Only with the creation of tertiary colleges did our further education become an irreplaceable rung on the ladder of opportunity, and that particular moment in educational history may now be lost as schools opt for the right to become free of their LEAs in order to preserve maximum numbers and a sixth form.

We also found that the political profile of the colleges we visited was high. Those who ran the institutions were impressive people and they were closely connected to the local political machine. We got the impression that the colleges counted in their communities and that their governors and regents counted for something in the scheme of things. Community college boards have members elected from the local district for something like four-year terms. They are public corporations and legally responsible for all college affairs, a status involving them in everything from personnel matters to purchasing materials. They also have a national body, the Association of Community College Trustees (AACT), whose publications and conferences are designed to ensure that board members do not look upon themselves as mere 'rubber stamps'.

Since our return from the United States in November 1986 much has happened in British FHE. The Government's first principle in HE is to encourage more people to enter it, though apparently without extra funds and with the intention of erecting a ring fence around institutions funded to provide the traditional high standards associated with three-year residential courses dependent upon a two 'A' level entry. We can only pray that the smaller institutions which have hitherto been dependent on the local

authorities for topping up funds, and on services related to employer status and the law, will be able to manage their affairs successfully and survive. If not, their demise will reduce the availability of HE, most noticeably in our rural counties.

Our American experience casts doubt upon the wisdom of that decision. We suggest that the questions of access and equity are still with us and that the answers to them will be concerned in large part with structure — with length of courses, types of assessment, transfer of credits, etc.

Perhaps the greatest service which the new National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) can offer us is a modular framework within which credit could be gained and transferred — which would put us one up on the Americans as many of their professional courses do not appear to carry transferable credit.

The role of the NCVQ may be all the more important if the Government's recent proposals on the further and higher education sectors have the predictable effect of drawing a strong line of demarcation between the two. From what we saw in America it is an advantage for a nation to have an orderly sequence of progression in its post-secondary education system. If that home of free enterprise, so often held up as an exemplar, can see merit in linking the segments of a service in a manner that reflects their essential unity, it should not be beneath our contempt to consider something similar.

It seems unfortunate that the Government's proposal to locate the strategic planning of further education in local authorities, yet to make college governors well-nigh autonomous, is likely to result in non-productive tension which will not help a co-ordinated delivery of the service. It is also disconcerting that the spirit of 'teenage vocationalism' pervades the consultation document on maintained FE (DES 1987b) when we know that the number of 16-19s is declining sharply.

Even if the age participation rate increases over the next few years, colleges will still be turning more to adult students and their requirements for vocational, social and cultural education. Very little of the consultation document refers to links with the community.

The emphasis on large numbers of industrial governors clearly implies that the Government sees FE as the handmaiden of business and commerce rather than a sector with a broad range of functions. It is in my view entirely

unreasonable to expect the majority shareholder in a college (still the LEA in most cases) to be limited to 25 per cent of the seats on the governing body.

Our fourth concern as we set off to the United States — the management of FE — has now been tackled with a vengeance, though still primarily in relation to efficiency. It is now as important as ever to emphasise criteria for effectiveness, and many of these will be based upon community perceptions of what colleges do well. In that respect we have much to learn from our American colleagues.

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